

CITY OF BELLEVUE
BELLEVUE PLANNING COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES

July 21, 2004
7:00 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
City Council Chambers

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Chair Lynde, Vice-Chair Bonincontri,
Commissioners Bach, Maggi, Mathews, Orrico

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Commissioner Robertson

STAFF PRESENT: Kathleen Burgess, Steve Cohn, Emil King, Nicholas Matz,
Mary Kate Berens, Department of Planning and
Community Development

GUEST SPEAKERS: None

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 7:02 p.m. by Chair Lynde who presided.

2. ROLL CALL

Upon the call of the roll, all Commissioners were present with the exception of Commissioner Robertson, who was excused.

3. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

The agenda was approved by consensus.

4. STAFF REPORTS

Kathleen Burgess, Planning Manager, provided the Commissioners with copies of the scope of the environmental review of the update to Vision 2020 which is being undertaken by the Puget Sound Regional Council. She said staff would be briefing the Commission on the update later in the fall.

5. PUBLIC COMMENT – None

6. COMMUNICATIONS FROM CITY COUNCIL, COMMUNITY COUNCIL, BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS – None

7. PUBLIC HEARING – Continued from July 7, 2004

A. 2004 Update to the Comprehensive Plan

Motion to continue the public hearing from July 7 was made by Commissioner Orrico. Second was by Commissioner Bach and the motion carried unanimously.

Ms. Burgess said the purpose for updating the Comprehensive Plan is to meet the December 1, 2004 deadline established by the Growth Management Act. She entered into the record the written comments received from the Parks and Community Services Board, John and Barbara Vynne, Kathy Gwilym, John Albertson, Carol Cullivan, Carolyn Maxim, Stuart Vander Hoek, and Paul Taipale. It was noted that additional written comments from the public would be accepted through the end of the public hearing.

Mr. Rich Wagner, 9917 Lake Washington Boulevard, spoke as a member of the board of directors of the West Bellevue Community Club and as a licensed professional engineer with a 30-year career in the design and planning of overhead and underground transmission and distribution systems and substations. He suggested that the term "Comprehensive Plan" implies that there is a comprehensive plan for the city, including a meaningful, long-term plan to serve the expected ultimate development within a given area. Without such a plan kept current, it is impossible to make good decisions regarding utility improvements. The city has long-range plans for the utilities it owns and operates, but there is no long-range plan for the electric system in the city which is owned and operated by Puget Sound Energy. Rather, the city counts on Puget Sound Energy to make its own decisions for improving its system as needed to meet load growth. Neither the 1993 Comprehensive Plan Utilities Element nor the proposed update to that element contain any semblance of a real long-range plan on which the City can base its approval decisions. The documents instead contain mostly narrative discussions of the plans of Puget Sound Energy for specific improvements; they are full of irrelevant data and sketches that make it appear a valid long-range plan really exists. No one should be fooled.

The current plan of Puget Sound Energy to triple the size of the Lochleven substation, which is located in a quiet residential neighborhood, and making it almost the size of a football field, is a perfect example of attempting to navigate without a good long-term plan. Nearly all substations in other cities that serve loads in downtown areas are located within the downtown core area, not around the perimeter in residential neighborhoods. The plan to expand the Lochleven substation may be totally inconsistent with the long-term plan to serve Downtown Bellevue, but it might be allowed under an improperly or ambiguously worded Comprehensive Plan, and at enormous cost to the residential neighbors. The Comprehensive Plan must require Puget Sound Energy to include a long-term plan to properly serve the expected, ultimate development across the city. Policy UT-32 should be revised to read: "Defer to the serving utility the implementation sequence of utility planned components, but only consistent with an up-to-date long-range plan that is designed to serve the expected ultimate development in the area of the proposed improvement." Policy S-DT-35 should be revised to read: "To meet the future electrical energy needs of the Downtown subarea, existing substations in residential neighborhoods should not be expanded, unless required under extremely unusual circumstances. Additional Downtown subarea load growth should be served from one or more new substations built within the Downtown subarea."

Ms. Arlene Darby, 10011 NE 30th Place, said she was happy to see housing and affordable housing covered in the update to the Comprehensive Plan. She noted that the subjects of hunger, housing, health care, jobs and transportation all go together. With regard to the notion of establishing 106th/108th as a one-way couplet in the Downtown, she suggested that one-way streets just do not work; they are too confusing. She noted that the concept of expanding NE 10th Street has been considered several times over the years, and each time the matter is put to bed it seems to rise up again. No one ever seems to talk about the fact that if the street is expanded it will require the demolition of the Ramada Inn. Bellevue has some wonderful luxury hotels, but also needs hotels or motels that are not expensive. The Ramada Inn has served the families of many who are visiting relatives at Overlake Hospital. The business has been successfully operating in Bellevue for many years, and bulldozing it does not seem wise. On the topic of

noise, it was stated that many people are losing their hearing at younger and younger ages. Printed information on noise and hearing loss was provided to the Commissioners.

Mr. Joseph Rosmann, 921 109th Avenue SE, spoke as president of the Surrey Downs Community Club. He commended the Commissioners for their efforts in updating the Comprehensive Plan. He said the Surrey Downs community from a pragmatic perspective provides a good laboratory for many of the fundamental issues that affect the long-term planning of both business and residential uses, and park and cultural uses and facilities. There is a unique demographic mix within the community that probably is leading the direction that much of the rest of the city will follow over the next ten or twenty years. The area has one of the single largest percentage concentrations of the elderly in the city. Surrey Downs was one of the first major neighborhoods of the central core of Bellevue to be developed, and many of the original residents still reside in the community. Bellevue is rapidly aging, and few recognize that fact which has huge implications for core infrastructure and the provision of social amenities and services. The aging of Bellevue also has implications for ensuring the preservation of housing components that meet the unique needs of the elderly, particularly those who wish to retain an independent living style in their own homes. Housing affordability, public safety and transportation options are all of utmost importance. In moving forward and in rehabilitating existing properties, nothing should be done to change the fundamental character of the neighborhoods. The north end of Surrey Downs should not suddenly be home to large, commercial condominium structures.

Mr. Robert Sheehan, 130 97th Avenue NE, said he is a retired professional engineer who spent most of his professional life in the electric utility industry. He concurred with the comments of Mr. Wagner and the need for the city to plan its electric utility like it plans every other utility. The proposed expansion of the Lochleven substation, tripling its capacity, has brought the issue to light. About half the current output of the existing substation goes to serve Bellevue Square. With Lincoln Square under construction, the action to expand the substation appears to be tied to providing power to that new development. The plan calls for even more expansion, and if that occurs five-sixths of the output will be dedicated to Downtown business and commercial uses, even though the station is in a residential neighborhood. There is clearly a misfit involved. Terrorism is a fact of life, yet it is nothing new. In 1976 there was a terrorist attack on power substations, one in Bellevue and one in Seattle. The worldwide terrorist threat has increased since then, and if anyone decides to go after the Lochleven substation, they will have to enter a residential neighborhood and put the residents at risk. The language of Policy UT-71 should be modified to incorporate language that includes terrorism as well as health effects in the consideration of siting. He suggested: "Require in the planning, siting and construction of all electric facilities, systems, lines and substations that the electric utility strike a reasonable balance between potential health effects and terrorism risks and the costs and impacts of mitigating those effects and risks by taking reasonable, cost-effective steps." Power for the Downtown should be supplied from substations located within the Downtown area.

Ms. Renay Bennett, 826 108th Avenue SE, spoke on behalf of the 108th Avenue Association. She thanked the Commission for its work in updating the Comprehensive Plan. The current residential focus of the Comprehensive Plan states that an essential goal of the Land Use Element is the protection and enhancement of Bellevue's single family and multifamily neighborhoods. The quality and integrity of Bellevue's residential neighborhoods make the city special; ensuring that the neighborhoods remain stable and vital is a primary concern. The proposed second paragraph of the residential/neighborhood areas introduction section starts with "Most Bellevue neighborhoods are stable...." The statement could be misleading in that "most" is not "all." The word "most" should be deleted. The second sentence of the paragraph should be revised to read "Maintaining and enhancing these qualities is a primary concern." With regard to the changes to Policy LU-37, the neighborhood is glad to hear it applies only to non-

residential areas. Page 10 of the subarea update discusses various development standards for the Downtown but leaves out stepbacks. Planning staff have stated that stepbacks will be included in future revisions of the Land Use Code, so the development standard should be included in the policy along with all the other listed development standards. The neighborhood association and the Surrey Downs Community Club have worked tirelessly for the last four years to see a linear buffer created along the south side of Main Street between 112th Avenue NE and Bellevue Way. The current plan calls for consideration of the buffer for only a two-block stretch; the language should be revised to include the entire distance between 112th Avenue NE and Bellevue Way. The issue is one of livability. Policy S-DT-97 should be changed from "...to the Surrey Downs neighborhood..." to "...to the neighborhoods south of this district..." The language of the Comprehensive Plan should be strengthened as it relates to protecting quality of life by using technology and landscaping to prevent and mitigate noise pollution.

Ms. Stacy LeBlanc-Anderson, 214 110th Avenue SE, vice-president of the Surrey Downs Community Club, said the current language of the Residential section of the Land Use Element "...Preserve, protect and strengthen the vitality and stability of existing neighborhoods..." is stronger and should be retained instead of "...Maintains the vitality, quality and character of Bellevue's residential neighborhoods, and supports the Downtown urban center and a variety of other commercial areas serving the city and the larger region..." She provided the Commission with copies of a letter written to the city in 2002 by the community club asking for green space to the south of Main Street and protection for the neighborhoods surrounding the Downtown. The language should be changed to call for green space between 112th Avenue NE and Bellevue Way. The proposed language moves too far toward emphasizing the concerns of business owners and the tax base; business owners and landowners already have plenty of support, and it is the neighborhoods that are in need of more support. There were 36 members on the Downtown Implementation Plan CAC, only three of which represented the neighborhoods.

Mr. Tim Dore, 122 105th Avenue NE, spoke as president of Bellevue Plaza, the shopping center located at 106th Avenue NE and NE 2nd Street. He said the property has been owned by his family since 1963. The notion that business and residential interests are always opposed should be stopped; often the views of both are the same. Local residents have been calling for a green space buffer to the south of Main Street, and the city and the Commission must recognize that along Main Street there is no complete system of working sidewalks. The policies place the onus for developing the sidewalk system on property owners and developers, which will always result in a patchwork system instead of a comprehensive system. Until the city decides to boldly move ahead with planning and funding work in the Downtown, everyone will continue to be disappointed. The Downtown Subarea Plan identifies a midblock connector at 105th Avenue NE; he said the property is owned by his family, and the public has been allowed to use it. If the city believes developing the street and connecting it to the grid is important, it should buy the property and take charge of its development. If the street is connected to the grid, however, there will be a direct connection with the Surrey Downs neighborhood, something those residents will likely be concerned about. The proposed 106th/108th one-way couplet absent the midblock connectors will not really work; the result for Bellevue Plaza will be a great deal of cut-through traffic. Over the years a great deal of work has been done to see the Downtown develop and flourish, and that body of work should be respected. The proposed plan as a whole is very good, but the one-way couplet and the midblock connection on 105th Avenue NE should be revisited.

There were no additional public speakers.

Motion to close the public hearing was made by Commissioner Bonincontri. Second was by Commissioner Bach and the motion carried unanimously.

8. STUDY SESSION

A. 2004 Update to the Comprehensive Plan

The Commission worked through the staff report. There was consensus to make the changes to the Introduction and Vision sections recommended by staff and outlined in the staff report. It was noted that the total park acreage should read “2,432”.

With regard to the issue of minimum density, Ms. Burgess said staff looked at the three zoning categories specifically called out by the organization 1000 Friends of Washington and determined that the vast majority of the areas developed at less than four units per acre have critical areas issues, are related to equestrian areas around Bridle Trails State Park, are the sites of public facilities such as parks, open spaces or golf courses, or are nearly fully developed. Three areas were not covered by these criteria which staff believes should receive a closer focus in a potential Comprehensive Plan amendment in 2005.

With regard to Policy LU-1, the Commission concurred with the staff-recommended revision. Associate Planner Steve Cohn said there was confusion with regard to the intent of Policy LU-4 and offered new language which the Commission also accepted.

The Commission agreed to the proposed revision to Policy LU-10, which Mr. Cohn said was to make clear that if a proposed development cannot be accessed from an arterial, access mitigation improvements will be required.

The Commission also accepted the proposal of staff to clarify the language of policies LU-15 and LU-18.

The Commissioners agreed to revise the first paragraph of the Residential/Neighborhood Areas Introduction as proposed by staff. There was consensus to revise the second paragraph in part as proposed during the public hearing so that it reads: “Most Bellevue neighborhoods are stable, well-maintained and characterized by a healthy level of reinvestment. Maintaining and enhancing these qualities is a primary concern.”

There was agreement to modify policies LU-20 and LU-26c as proposed by staff.

With regard to Policy LU-22, Chair Lynde suggested revising it to read: “Protect residential areas from the impacts of residential and non-residential uses of a scale not appropriate to the neighborhood.” She allowed that her intent in making the change was to get at the issue of mega-houses.

There was agreement to revise policies LU-25, LU-26, and LU-27, as well as the second paragraph of the subareas section of the Land Use Element, as outlined in the staff report.

The Commissioners concurred with the proposal of staff to revise the third paragraph of the Neighborhood Quality and Vitality section of the Housing Element as highlighted in the staff report, and to accept the proposed revisions to policies HO-1, HO-4, HO-6, and HO-9. It was further agreed to add the proposed sentence to the Infill Housing paragraph calling for consultation with any affected neighborhood residents prior to implementation of any housing demonstration project, and to revise Policy HO-15 to be consistent with the discussion paragraph.

There was agreement to revise Policy HO-16 to allow for detached accessory dwelling units, and

Policy HO-24 as proposed in the staff report.

With regard to Policy HO-33, Ms. Burgess said the Human Services Commission in a letter to the Planning Commission outlined their support for using financial incentives, especially the ten-year multifamily tax exemption program, to encourage the construction of affordable multifamily housing units, not all multifamily housing. The city is not doing well at all in meeting the low-income housing targets, so it makes sense to have the policy targeted only at affordable housing. The term “affordable housing” would be specifically defined with the passage of an ordinance.

Commissioner Bach commented that the overall goal of 10,000 housing units over the coming years is a very large target. Most of those units will be multifamily units, and unless the market dramatically improves, it will be difficult to meet the goal without some incentives. There is very little land left in the city on which to construct apartments, except in the Downtown core where the land prices are the highest. Incentives should be used to rehabilitate aging stock. Ms. Burgess commented that the rehabilitation of existing multifamily housing is allowed under the state’s ten-year multifamily property tax exemption program. Rents being seen for new multifamily units coming online are well above the affordable range for median income families; at least for this one program, the focus should be on affordable units only. While the details would be included in an ordinance, at least a certain percentage of the units in a complex would need to be deemed affordable in order to qualify, though there is some latitude permitted local jurisdictions.

It was agreed to revise Policy HO-33 as suggested by staff.

Ms. Burgess noted that the Human Services Commission also proposed adding transitional housing to Policy HO-39. Transitional housing is an important niche between emergency housing and permanent housing. The city funds transitional housing projects through ARCH and as such the practice should be highlighted in the policy. The Commissioners concurred.

Senior Planner Nicholas Matz agreed that the reference to the location of Table CF.2, Additional Resources, should be corrected in the Capital Facilities Element. The Commission also accepted the proposed change to the fourth paragraph of the Overview section to make it read better.

Mr. Matz explained that the revisions on pages 24 and 25 of the staff report represent an attempt to eliminate some duplicative language related to the land use forecasts. The Commission agreed with the revisions through page 27 of the staff report, as well as the proposed revision to Policy CF-15, and the proposal to delete the word “television” from the term “cable television.”

Staff was not present to comment on the Transportation Element revisions. It was agreed that the Transportation Element would be reviewed at the end of the meeting when staff arrived or at the next Commission meeting.

There was agreement to amend the Economic Development Element goal and overview sections to reflect the notion of balancing a sustainable natural environment and a high quality of life. There was also agreement to explain the acronyms on all charts and graphs.

Mr. Cohn said staff did not agree with the suggestion to rename the “Challenges” section “Weaknesses,” but agreed it could be called “Weaknesses and Challenges.” He said staff also agreed with the notion of adding the high cost of housing as a challenge.

Commissioner Orrico said she would prefer not to use the word “weaknesses,” adding that the list is focused on challenges, no weaknesses. The word “challenges” is far more positive.

There was consensus not to use the word “weaknesses.”

There was agreement to revise Policies ED-3 and ED-13 as proposed, and to revise the goal of the Planning and Infrastructure section as outlined in the staff report.

The Commissioners concurred with changing “them” to “such centers” in Policy ED-27. There was agreement to retain the phrase “high quality” in the same policy, but with regard to changing “vibrant” to “dynamic” Commissioner Bach said he saw little difference between the two words within the context of the overall policy. Mr. Cohn explained that the policy is focused on plans review for new shopping center development. In looking at the way things are laid out, judgments can be made about the results. A dynamic center is a place where things are happening. “Vibrant” is a term that suggests life in the sense of being financially viable and occupied. Commissioner Bach said he could accept leaving out both words and just leaving in “high quality.”

Commissioner Orrico suggested that “dynamic” could also mean a multifaceted center where there are many different things going on. “Vibrant” on the other hand could be interpreted to mean busy or high energy. It is entirely possible to have a quiet neighborhood shopping center that is dynamic but not necessarily vibrant or high energy.

It was agreed to use the word “dynamic” in the policy.

Legal Planner Mary Kate Berens said the changes to the Environmental Element are outlined in the Commission packet beginning on page 131. She said all three relate to recognizing that the Parks Department and the Utilities Department own land in the city and have their own policies that include environmental preservation, that they also hold those properties for other purposes. The revisions are intended to inject some balance relative to the missions each department must carry out.

Ms. Berens noted that the Parks and Community Services Board had supplied the Planning Commission with a memo commenting on the proposal to add language concerning uses allowed in critical areas. She said staff was not recommending the Parks Board proposal because it is narrower than the Land Use Code currently allows. It was agreed to make the revisions proposed by staff and not the Parks Board, and to have staff make minor modifications to the wording to have it read better and review it again at the next Commission meeting.

Commissioner Bach asked if bulkheads are counted as impervious surfaces. Ms. Berens said they generally are not, adding that as part of the Land Use Code amendment there will be closer attention paid to what should be defined as impervious and not impervious. Other jurisdictions do not generally include bulkheads as impervious surfaces.

Ms. Burgess said no revisions are recommended to the Human Services Element, other than minor grammatical changes.

With regard to the Urban Design Element, Senior Planner Emil King said staff agrees with the notion of taking a closer look at requiring design review in portions of the Light Industrial, General Commercial and Office/Limited Business zoning districts. The closer look will likely occur in 2005, and to effect the change a rewording of Policy UD-42 is in order. The Commission concurred with the proposed revision as outlined on page 48 of the staff report.

Commissioner Orrico asked why the focus should be only on boulevards. Mr. King said

boulevards provide the greatest opportunity for noticeable change. Design review can be a more cumbersome process, and it may not make sense to require it on streets that are less visible. During the process of amending the Zoning Code the Commission could take a look at the impacts along non-boulevard streets as well.

There was agreement to make the change to Policies UD-50 and UD-51 as proposed. Chair Lynde asked if it would be appropriate to revise Policy UD-51 by including the notion of noise. Mr. King suggested that the issue would be more appropriately covered in the Transportation Element.

There was agreement to remove the references to the Newcastle subarea and to add to the Historic Resources section language about the coal mining history of the area south of I-90.

Mr. King proposed a new policy for the Downtown Subarea Plan in line with a comment offered by King County Metro regarding transit and its relationship to pedestrian movement in the Downtown area. There was agreement to accept the new policy as proposed, and to revise the Regional and Local Transit section focused on park and ride lot capacity and the 106th/108th one-way couplet circulation as suggested in the staff report.

There was agreement to change Policy S-DT-132 as proposed, with the exception that “effective” should be used in place of “attractive.”

Mr. King said proposed new policy S-DT-XX shown on page 53 of the staff report relates to the need for additional bus layover locations in the Downtown in the coming years. He said the language was originally proposed by King County Metro but has been slightly modified.

Chair Lynde suggested revising it to read “...within or near the Downtown....” She noted that there are areas just across the freeway that are reasonably close that could serve as layover areas. The Downtown has little room available in which to park a lot of buses. She clarified that no bus layover locations should be permitted in residential areas. Mr. King allowed that it is not an easy process to find bus layover spaces, either within the Downtown or the non-residential areas around the Downtown. Such spaces need to be fairly close to the Transit Center. Chair Lynde said she would not want to see the city’s hands tied by saying they can only occur in the Downtown.

Commissioner Orrico proposed deleting from the proposed policy the phrase “within Downtown.”

Mr. King said he would work on alternative language for the policy and bring it back for review at the next Commission meeting.

There was agreement to revise Policy S-DT-141 regarding the use of computerized traffic control systems to encourage transit speed and reliability.

Ms. Burgess said a full response from staff regarding the Lochleven power substation issue will be brought to the next Commission meeting.

Commissioner Matthews asked staff to bring to the next meeting some background information on the mid-block vehicular connections and one-way couplet issues.

Ms. Burgess said the next Commission meeting will be on August 4.

9. OLD BUSINESS – None

10. NEW BUSINESS – None

11. PUBLIC COMMENT

Ms. Stacy LeBlanc-Anderson, 214 110th Avenue SE, said she was under the impression that the Downtown Implementation Plan CAC forwarded the idea of funding a study to identify view corridors and all historical properties in the city. She questioned why that notion does not appear in the proposed plan.

Mr. King said there are four new policies in the proposed Downtown Subarea Plan that specifically discuss the notion of historic preservation and developing a contingency plan for preserving Downtown historic resources. There is an existing survey of historic properties in the city, and ten of the Downtown properties on the survey remain. The survey was last updated in 1997 and staff is recommending that when funding is available the resource should be updated again. The issue of view corridors was scoped in the Downtown Implementation Plan planning process but was not something the CAC chose to make a formal recommendation on.

Ms. Renay Bennett, 826 108th Avenue SE, suggested that transitional housing is something that should not be addressed by the city unless required to do so. Transitional housing should be a function of the economy. If someone wants to build it and can make money doing so, they should be permitted to, but the government should not be involved in advocating for it or allowing or encouraging the building of it. She agreed with the suggestion of Chair Lynde to add the issue of noise to Policy UD-50. She commented that every little bit of growth pressure, including noise, air quality and changes to zoning and land use, adds up to a lot after a decade. The city should keep in mind that all mitigations add something to some portion of the city, whether it is the business community or the residential community.

12. ADJOURNMENT

Chair Lynde adjourned the meeting at 9:12 p.m.